

ON A FORM OF WOMERAH, OR "THROWING-STICK," PRESUMED TO BE UNDESCRIBED.

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I am indebted to Mrs. John Storer for the opportunity of describing a *Womerah*, or "Throwing-stick," different to any I had previously seen figured or described.

The late Governor Eyre described the Throwing-stick in general, or *ngā-wā-ōak*, as he terms it in one of the Aboriginal dialects, as from "twenty to twenty-six inches in length, and is of a very similar character throughout the continent, varying a little in width or shape according to the fashion of particular districts. It consists of a piece of hardwood, broad about the middle, flattened and sometimes hollowed on the inside, and tapering to either extremity; at the point the tooth of a kangaroo is tied and gummed on, turning downwards like a hook; the opposite end has a lump of pitch with a flint set in it, moulded round so as to form a knob, which prevents the hand from slipping whilst it is being used, or it is wound round with string made of the fur of the opossum for the same purpose. In either case it is held by the lower part in the palm of the hand, clasped firmly by the three lower fingers, with its upper part resting between the forefinger and the next; the head of the spear, in which is a small hole, is fitted to the kangaroo tooth, and then coming down between the forefinger and thumb, is firmly grasped for throwing."\* It is manifest that this can only be accepted as a very general description.

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\* Journ. Exped. Discovery into Central Australia, 1845, ii., p. 307.

Eyre figured four different kinds of womerah, varying in their width, sectional outline, and shape, but all with the mounted kangaroo tooth at the proximal end, and a lump of gum, or gum and a stone, at the distal extremity. The width, and in consequence the shape, differs in all four types, but in the narrowest there is a flattened surface on which the spear could, if necessary, lie.

The late Mr. R. B. Smyth figured\* five types from Victoria and two from West Australia. The Victorian womerachs, all but one, belong to the shield-shaped pattern, the exception being a mere stick. The distal end is either mounted with a tooth, as described by Eyre, or carved into the form of a hook, whilst the proximal extremity is devoid of any check to the hand at all. The stick-like womerah is a very rude and rough weapon. Smyth stated that the womerah was known to the Yarra Tribe as *Kur-reek*, or *Gur-reek*; by the Goulburn (Victoria) Tribe called *Murri-wun*; or at Lake Tyers in Gippsland *Merri-wun*; on the Lower Murray River, *Moor-oon*; and by others *Meera* or *Womerah*. The West Australian throwing-stick is much more shield-shaped than any of the others, and is mounted at the proximal end with gum, whilst a hardwood peg at the opposite end does duty for the kangaroo incisor.

The womerah from North-West Australia is again of a somewhat different type, much longer and rather spatula-like, without a check to the hand at the proximal end, but, on the contrary, a portion cut out to accommodate the hand of the thrower. Smyth remarked on the West Australian womerachs:—"The flat shield-like *womerachs* in my collection are made of djarrah, and are very thin and well polished. They are not ornamented in any way. The point for receiving the end of the spear is made of very hard white wood, and is fastened to the head with gum; and there is a lump of gum at the end, so placed as to prevent the implement from slipping in the hand. The length is one foot ten inches, and

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\* *Aborigines of Victoria*, 1878, i., p. 309.

the greatest width five inches. The weight varies from seven and three-quarter ounces to ten ounces.”\*

The womerah from Agate Creek, a tributary of the Gilbert River, and the subject of the present notice, was obtained by Dr. John Storer, and its genuineness thereby attested. It is two feet



ten and a half inches in length, one and a quarter inches in breadth, but only three-eighths of an inch in thickness, wholly in the same plane, flat at the sides, and sharp and ridge-like above and below, with hardly any perceptible decrease in breadth towards either end. The weight is eight ounces, and the weapon is quite rigid and well polished. The hinder end is obliquely cut off, and against it is fitted a well made peg of hard dark wood, attached by black gum-cement and sinews, and taking the place of the kangaroo tooth. At the proximal or fore end, against each of the flat sides of the womerah, is affixed, with gum-cement, portions of the shell of *Melo diadema*. The peg is one and three-quarter inches long, and the portion of shell two inches.

This weapon is a very peculiar type of womerah, owing to its rigid lath-like form and the absence of any flattened transverse surface similar to several of those figured by Eyre and Smyth. The pieces of shell at the fore end take the place of the lump of gum, or gum and stone, in the more southern types. The sides of the throwing-stick are quite plain and uncarved, but smooth and well polished. The substitution of shell for gum alone at the fore end is evidently not of common occurrence.

On showing the Agate Creek womerah to my Colleague Mr. John Brazier, he was at once struck with its resemblance to throwing-sticks obtained at Cape Grenville, North-East Australia, during the progress of the “Chevert Expedition;” and referred me for other examples to the Macleay Museum. Therein I saw,

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\* Aborigines of Victoria, 1878, i., p. 338.

through the kindness of the Curator, Mr. George Masters, a series of four from Cape Grenville, the Herbert River, and the Batavia River, Gulf of Carpentaria. The Herbert River weapon is exactly the counterpart of that from Agate Creek, but is one inch longer; that from Cape Grenville swells out in breadth in the centre, being two and seven-eighths wide, graduating off towards the fore end so as to accommodate itself to the hand of the thrower. At the same time, it is equally as thin as the womerah from Agate Creek, but the shells are set at right angles to the shaft, instead of obliquely. The length is two feet two inches. The Batavia River womerah is precisely similar to the last. It is, however, two inches longer and three inches at the widest point. The hand-grasp is gummed to afford a better hold to the thrower, the same part in the womerah from Cape Grenville being bound with a reed also. These throwing-sticks form a well-marked type, differing entirely from those used in the south and south-west, and, like the large, irregularly oval, light wood, painted shields, seem to be chiefly confined to the north-east of the continent.

It is much to be regretted that some one does not undertake a systematic description of the Aboriginal wooden weapons and implements, district by district, when, I am quite sure, much useful and instructive information would be forthcoming. A great deal of praiseworthy research was carried on by the late Robert Brough Smyth, and detailed in his work on the *Aborigines of Victoria*,\* but so much information has been gathered since he wrote that it would be better to commence the subject *de novo*.

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\* 2 vols., 4to, Melbourne, 1878. By Authority.